

Blackberries:

tasty terror

Blackberries were a popular plant in Australia 200 years ago, and not just for their delicious fruit. People also thought it was a good idea to plant blackberries along the sides of streams to stop the soil from being washed away. Within 20 years, wild blackberries had become a serious weed.

Weeds are plants that take over an area so that few other plants can live there. Blackberries are one of Australia's most damaging weeds because they spread quickly and in many different ways.

Blackberries sprout lots of canes from a central crown. New canes grow every year. They grow rapidly (half a centimetre a day) and can grow up to seven metres long. The canes grow over the top of many other plants and block out the light so these other plants die. Each year some old blackberry canes die, making a thorny thicket in the middle of the blackberry patch. Hardly anything else can live there.

Blackberries are also spread by seeds. One berry can contain as many as 80 seeds which are spread by birds, animals, people and water.

However, blackberries do not rely only on seeds to make new plants. The diagram shows other ways that blackberries spread. Suckers grow up from the roots and start new plants. Even a tiny piece of root that has been chopped off can grow into a new plant. Where a cane tip touches the ground, it will grow a new daughter plant. In its first year a cane does not flower or produce fruit. It uses all its energy to grow and spread.

Council workers often spray wild blackberries with poison to try to get rid of them – so never eat wild blackberries.

How blackberries make new plants

